

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-15 USIA-15

RSR-01 /095 W

----- 120128

R 021305Z AUG 73

FM AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4892

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL BELFAST

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PBOR, EI

SUBJ: DUBLIN REACTION AFTER FIRST MEETING OF NI ASSEMBLY

SUMMARY: NEWSPAPERS ARE DISMAYED BY LOYALIST ANTICS IN NI ASSEMBLY'S FIRST MEETING. GOI SOURCE, WHILE NOT HAPPY, SAID OBSTRUCTION WAS NO WORSE THAN EXPECTED. SAME SOURCE EXPECTS THAT STANDING-ORDERS COMMITTEE WILL MEET ON SCHEDULE AND PRODUCE CONCLUSIONS AFTER FOUR WEEKS. HE INSISTS THAT GOI IS FIRMLY SUPPORTING SDLP POSITION, WHICH LINKS ESTABLISHMENT OF NI EXECUTIVE TO POLICE REFORM AND PROGRESS TOWARD COUNCIL OF IRELAND. IF GOI ADHERES TO THIS POSITION, THERE IS APPARENT POTENTIAL FOR CLASH NOT ONLY WITH UNIONISTS BUT WITH BRITISH. WE ARE NOT YET CONVINCED GOI WILL GO THAT FAR.

1. JOURNALISTS IN ALL PAPERS WERE DEPRESSED BY FIRST MEETING OF NEW NI ASSEMBLY ON JULY 31. FOCUS OF COMMENT WAS LOYALIST DEMONSTRATION THAT BROUGHT MEETING TO AN UNDIGNIFIED END. EDITORIAL WRITERS BELIEVED THAT OCCASION WAS TOO SERIOUS FOR ANYONE TO LAUGH AT LOYALIST PERFORMANCE WHICH MIGHT, UNDER OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES, HAVE BEEN TREATED AS A MERE FARCE. "IRISH TIMES" EDITORIAL SAID THAT DEMONSTRATORS WERE "DANCING ON THE COFFINS"

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OF THE NORTH'S 800 RECENT DEAD. ECHOING BRIAN FAULKNER,

HOWEVER, SAME EDITORIAL HOPED FOR ONE SILVER LINING:
LOYALISTS MIGHT AT LEAST LEARN SOMETHING FROM PUBLIC
REJECTION OF THEIR ANTICS.

2. WE DISCUSSED MEETING, AND PROSPECTS FOR FUTURE,
WITH SOURCE CLOSE TO FONMIN. HE TOLD US THAT LOYALIST
PERFORMANCE, BAD AS IT WAS, WAS NO WORSE THAN HE HAD
EXPECTED. HE BELIEVED THAT LOYALIST OBSTRUCTION OF
THIS KIND COULD IN FACT MAKE IT ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE FOR
ASSEMBLY TO FUNCTION. HE HAD SOME HOPE, HOWEVER, THAT
LOYALIST COALITION WOULD BE SLIGHTLY MORE RESTRAINED
AFTER PUBLICITY GIVEN THEIR FIRST PERFORMANCE. NEW
UNIONIST PRESIDING OFFICER NAT MINFORD HAD MADE A BAD
MISTAKE WHEN HE FAILED TO FIX DATE FOR NEXT ASSEMBLY
MEETING, BUT HE HAD POWER TO RECTIFY OVERSIGHT AND CALL
ASSEMBLY BACK INTO SESSION. SOURCE HAD NO IDEA WHAT
DATE FOR NEXT MEETING WOULD BE, HOWEVER.

3. SOURCE UNDERSTOOD THAT ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON STANDING
ORDERS WOULD COME INTO EXISTENCE SOON. SDLP WOULD HAVE
THREE SEATS ON COMMITTEE, OFFICIAL UNIONISTS FOUR, AND
ALLIANCE PROBABLY TWO. MEMBERS OF LOYALIST COALITION
MIGHT ALSO BE INVITED TO NOMINATE MEMBERS, BUT WOULD
PRESUMABLY DECLINE. WE ASKED SOURCE WHETHER
HE THOUGHT THAT NEW NI EXECUTIVE, WHEN IT IS FINALLY
SET UP, WOULD BE FORMED ALONG SAME LINES. HE DID NOT
THINK THERE WOULD NECESSARILY BE ANY SIMILARITY.
EXECUTIVE WOULD BE ENTIRE NEW PROBLEM WHICH, HE THOUGHT,
COULD NOT YET BE TACKLED.

4. SOURCE BELIEVED THAT STANDING-ORDERS COMMITTEE WILL
MEETIN PRIVATE SESSIONS FOR ABOUT FOUR WEEKS, BEGINNING
DISCUSSIONS ON BASIS OF GUIDELINES FURNISHED BY BRITISH.
WHEN COMMITTEE PRODUCES ITS CONCLUSIONS TO FULL MEMBERSHIP
OF ASSEMBLY, "MORE TROUBLE" IS EXPECTED.

5. WE ASKED SOURCE WHETHER HE COULD HELP US PUT
PIECES OF NI PUZZLE TOGETHER AND FORESEE WHAT NEW
ADMINISTRATION WILL LOOK LIKE IN FEW MONTHS TIME--ASSUMING
THAT POLITICAL PROGRESS CONTINUES AT ALL. SOURCE SAID
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THAT PIECES HAD NOT YET FALLEN INTO PLACE FOR HIM EITHER,
BUT HE CONFIRMED THAT APPROACHES OF MAJOR GROUPS ARE
STILL FAR APART. WHEN BRITISH TALK ABOUT NI PROGRESS,
THEY SEEM TO MEAN ONLY PROGRESS IN FORMING NEW ASSEMBLY
AND POWER-SHARING EXECUTIVE UNDER TERMS OF WHITE PAPER--
PREFERABLY BEFORE OCTOBER. SDLP ALSO WANTS TO WORK
CONSTRUCTIVELY WITHIN TERMS OF WHITE PAPER, BUT THINKS
PROGRESS IN ASSEMBLY MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY POLICE

REFORM AND CREATION OF A MEANINGFUL COUNCIL OF IRELAND.
THIS SEEMS LIKE VERY LONG MENU. SOURCE SAID, HOWEVER,
THAT GOI COMPLETELY BACKS SDLP. LOYALISTS REJECT ANY
PROGRESS
AT ALL UNDER TERMS OF WHITE PAPER, WHILE
FAULKNER UNIONISTS HAVE AVOIDED CLEAR POSITIONS.

6. WE WERE PROBING FOR ANY SIGN OF WEAKNESS IN GOI
SUPPORT FOR SDLP POSITION. SOME JOURNALISTS HAVE SAID
THAT SDLP FEARS GOI MAY, IN CRUNCH, BACK DOWN ON POLICE
REFORM AND COUNCIL OF IRELAND. IF GOI POSITION IS IN
FACT SOFT, WE MAY DETECT FLEXIBILITY IN POLICY SPEECH
EXPECTED FROM PM COSGRAVE IN NEAR FUTURE. FOR NOW, WE
SURMISE THAT RUMORS OF GOI/SDLP FRICTION ARE MAINLY
RESULT OF WELL KNOWN PERSONALITY CLASHES. MANY SDLP
MEMBERS, AND ESPECIALLY PADDY DEVLIN, INTENSELY DISLIKE
CONOR CRUISE-O'BRIEN.

7. OUR SOURCE INSISTED THAT GOI AS A WHOLE THINKS SDLP
IS ENTIRELY RIGHT TO INSIST ON URGENT POLICE REFORM AND
FORMATION OF COUNCIL OF IRELAND. WE ASKED WHETHER PRO-
FAULKNER UNIONISTS WOULD BE FLEXIBLE ENOUGH TO GO ALONG
WITH SDLP. SOURCE BELIEVED THAT FAULKNER'S PROBLEMS
WERE "NOT INSURMOUNTABLE." SDLP, ON OTHER HAND, NOW
BELIEVES THAT IT SIMPLY MUST INSIST ON EFFECTIVE
EXPRESSION OF "IRISH DIMENSION." IF SDLP DID NOT NOW
DIG IN ITS HEELS, IT MIGHT FIND THAT COUNCIL OF IRELAND
WOULD NOT MATERIALIZE AT ALL DURING FORESEEABLE FUTURE.
PROMISES WERE NOT GOOD ENOUGH; THERE MUST BE REAL
PROGRESS. TO SUPPORT THIS ARGUMENT, SOURCE OBSERVED
THAT PROMISES MADE IN DOWNING STREET DECLARATION OF
1969 HAD NOT YET BEEN CARRIED OUT. HE DID NOT DOUBT
THAT BRITISH WERE SINCERE IN THEIR PROMISES, AND HE
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RECOGNIZED THAT THERE WAS USUALLY VERY GOOD REASON FOR
NOT IMPLEMENTING THEM. NEVERTHELESS, AT SOME POINT, A
FIRM STAND WOULD HAVE TO BE MADE.

8. COMMENT: ON ONE PREVIOUS OCCASION, GOI ANNOUNCED
INTENTION TO INSIST ON COUNCIL OF IRELAND, BUT THEN
BACKED AWAY FROM CRUNCH. THIS WAS AT TIME OF WHITE
PAPER (DUBLIN 129, 374, 606). DESPITE SOURCE'S
INSISTENCE THAT GOI LINE IS FIRM, WE STILL FIND IT
DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE THAT DUBLIN WILL INSIST ON
LINKAGE BETWEEN COUNCIL OF IRELAND AND NI ASSEMBLY.
AT SAME TIME, WE DO NOT DOUBT THAT GOI HAS BASIC
DETERMINATION TO ACHIEVE EFFECTIVE COUNCIL AS SOON AS
POSSIBLE.
MOORE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 02 AUG 1973
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: cunninfx
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973DUBLIN01018
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: n/a
From: DUBLIN
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19730863/aaaabube.tel
Line Count: 169
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: cunninfx
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 27 AUG 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <27-Aug-2001 by boyleja>; APPROVED <27-Sep-2001 by cunninfx>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: DUBLIN REACTION AFTER FIRST MEETING OF NI ASSEMBLY SUMMARY: NEWSPAPERS ARE DISMAYED BY LOYALIST ANTICS IN
TAGS: PBOR, EI
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005